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A FRIENDLY CHAT WITH A SPUDBOY . . .

BY JEFF SPURRIER

When Devo first burst upon the pop music scene in 1978 with its spud manifesto, "Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo," the combination of quirky beats, industrial couture and the message of de-evolution sent shivers of delight up many a critic's spine. Its second album, "Duty Now for the Future," did not fare as well, either commercially or critically. With the release of "Freedom of Choice," the Ohio-born, L.A.-based quintet is making an admittedly more accessible attempt at being profitably entertaining — but not at any cost.

"Devo's just a group of spuds trying to maintain some integrity and make a statement," said Jerry Casale, bassist and main theoretician for the band.

"Freedom of Choice" is not, he explained, a new statement on de-evolution.

"Album one is like the Bible—you make your statement once. It's hard to do it again without sounding redundant. What you do next is produce the goods—that is, show in substance what it's all about. The criticism on the second album was that we didn't do that.

" 'Freedom of Choice' has everything that is good about Devo in it. The songs *do* reflect the nature of living in a devolved world. I think we have the same subject matter, the same points of reference as the Clash. We are writing about the same things: schizoid pessimism and optimism in a world gone upside down where there is no real frontier left. The idea of what a human being is has been twisted inside out and the corporate state rules."

"If anything, the last four years have proved Devo's claims. Things are rapidly deteriorating.

"What's going on in the world right now is really *devo*. The news that comes in—the hostages, the starving, the fighting, the bizarre political situations. It's obvious that humans are creating this horrible level of reality that just isn't necessary. They are doing it to themselves. It's because of the way they think. The only wars now are wars about how people should think about being on earth. That's World War III—it's in the mind."

Despite his somewhat gloomy view, Casale expressed hope for the future, provided that the public comes to terms with the present.

"People are still running backwards with '60s revival, but I think the revival has finally played itself out. You can go back and wear skinny ties and look mod and indulge in that kind of safety and nostalgia for so long. Once that is out of people's systems—then it *is* the '80s." □

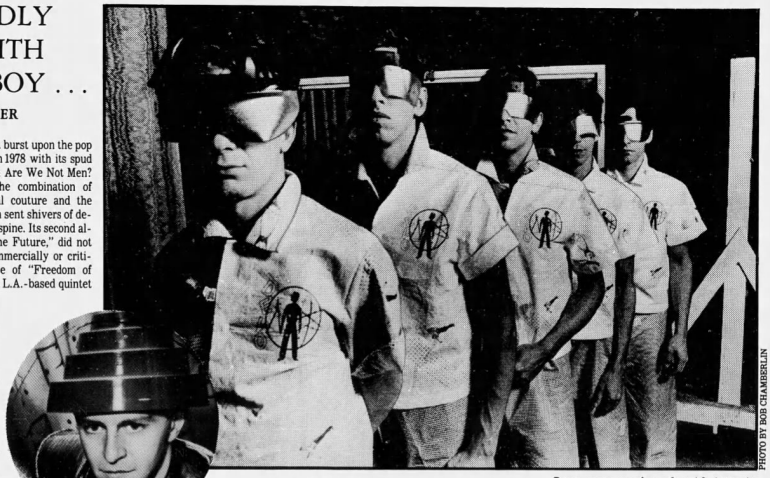

PHOTO BY HERB CHARLES GREENBERG

Devo's Jerry Casale

. . . BUT HARSH WORDS FOR DEVO'S NEW LP

BY R. MELTZER

Devo: a group of spuds with integrity and a statement, or just a shoddy cartoon version of the new music?

"FREEDOM OF CHOICE" Devo. Warner Bros. BSK 3435.

The second-hardest chore in dealing with Devo's third LP is coming up with the right word to adequately convey just how bloody *awful* the whole thing truly is. Trash? No, trash contains shards of substance; "Freedom of Choice" does not. Pablum? No, pab's got nutriment (chemically derived or otherwise). Swill? Now that's more like it: insipid, unflavored and—most crucially—extremely *thin*. Rarely has there been a package so totally devoid of even the most minimally functional *non*-value.

First hardest is listening to it, even once, all the way through, which is not meant as a glib non sequitur, because (to draw from a non-misplaced analogy) who but a brain-damaged 9-year-old even reads Marvel Comics—first frame to last—any more? Look, maybe, but *read*? Devo never has been any more than a shoddy cartoon version of "the new," a mock-contempo-alienation brigade for only the biggest of nerds and recoding secretaries for high-school chess clubs (my apologies to Bobby Fischer) whose mothers only let 'em listen to Leonard Bernstein. While the TRUE NEW is busting out all over (Public Image, X, the Fall et al), Devo continues to offer an increasingly ersatz variety, akin to Paul Anka daring to stand in for Elvis, or Strawberry Alarm Clock for the Grateful Dead.

Pyramid insanity notwithstanding, it is highly unlikely that they will be able to sucker in any new fish this time around, unless, of course, the fish, rubes and dupes of consumer America have come home to roost somewhat ahead of schedule (it's possible I guess). If anybody's gone sucker-bait, it's Devo itself. Having fallen for its own hype as Jerry Lewises of the we've-run-out-of-names-so-you-name-it-yourself generation, they flounder through a dozen cursory (at best) readings from the primal text of "Jerkingtons Incarnate" (author unknown) without even really celebrating or elucidating their self-professed bozo status in the process.

As is usual for a gang so inured to sub-Ogden Nash lyrical claptrap, double-entendre attempts are numerous ("Whip It," "Snow Ball," etc., etc.), but with less novelty or irony than ever to back it up, it all reduces to zero entendre or—to coin a phrase—*nolo entendre*. When the group enters the hard-poetry sweepstakes with vectors of intended metaphoric oompah like "She sends out an aroma of undefined lust" (undefined lust?) in "Girl U Want," its pathetic pratfall may make Billy Joel seem like Shakespeare in comparison, but it's not even good for a laugh in context.

Other than for the diversion of playing spot-the-"Pretty-Woman"-riff in the intros of at least two songs, there isn't a thimbleful of even the simpiest of music-listener options on the disc. They've gotta be the lamest synthesizer band of all time, lamer even than the worst of—what was it called?—oh yes, disco. Zappa at his most tritely abysmal never has been so neutrally translucent, and he's always counterbalanced the shortcomings of his musical imagination by throwing in an occasional toilet joke to at least raise an eyebrow or force a wince. Maybe they could try to instigate a CB revival. □

STIFF LITTLE FINGERS: PUNK WITH PUNCH

BY TERRY ATKINSON

"NOBODY'S HEROES." Stiff Little Fingers. Chrysalis CHR 1270.

'It could be our 'Led Zeppelin II,' " a member of this Northern Ireland punk-rock band has said about its second album—not a remark to delight the group's fans. But the album should. "Heroes" may indeed be to its field what "LZ II" was to hard rock; it follows up a promising debut with a more mature work that features a focusing of direction and a potentially wider appeal.

"Punk" may be nearly obsolete as a label, but it still best describes SLF's raw, ripping technique. Songs on its debut LP like "Suspect Device" and "Rough Trade" bristled with the street toughness and anger of the band's native Belfast. However, the vocals frequently weren't up to the instrumental thrust and the album had its share of disappointing numbers.

Jake Burns still isn't the most on-key singer in the world, but he's more confident and steady and as fiery as ever. The new album's topics are more general than the Ulster-concerned debut, but no less rippingly treated. Maturation hasn't softened SLF so much as widened and deepened its attack. Best are "At the Edge" and "Wait and See"—mini-anthems that tear at the system with as much convincing vehemence as the Clash's best.

SLF has grown up a bit, but remains a prime example of '80s rock at its most wonderfully, slashingly naive. "Nobody's Heroes" proves that punk can still pack a punch. □

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